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FEATURED

## Greater Johnstown graduate 'on top of the mountain' at Republican National Convention

By Dave Sutor

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Justin Capouellez of Johnstown is shown at Quicken Loans Arena during the Republican National Convention on Monday, July 18, 2016.

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CLEVELAND – Nine years ago this summer, Justin Capouellez, then 15, found himself in the back of a police car.

Twice.

It was for petty offenses: breaking curfew and stealing a bike. The incidents could have been a harbinger of bad things to come. Instead, the Johnstown resident used the low points as motivation to straighten out his life and embrace faith when his “heart was just open at the right time.”

He attended Penn Highlands Community College and graduated from Indiana University of Pennsylvania with a bachelor's in psychology this year. His political interests include participating in student government and being an intern for state Sen. Don White from the 41st district.

And, currently, Capouellez is attending the Republican National Convention in Cleveland through IUP's partnership with The Washington Center, an independent, nonprofit organization serving hundreds of colleges.

“It's an unforgettable part of my journey where, when I look at the mountain peaks, I can say I've been on top of the mountain,” Capouellez, now 24, said.

The first week of the experience included seminars during which Capouellez learned about how to design a campaign strategy and put together a legislative budget.

“It gave me an appreciation for any legislator and for the work they do to put a budget together,” said Capouellez, who plans to begin work on a master's in communications at Queens University of Charlotte this fall.

During convention week, he has assisted the Pennsylvania delegation, attended a party at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum, and watched the convention taking place inside the Quicken Loans Arena.

“Every once in a while, when you have a goal bigger than yourself, you encounter those little moments,” said Capouellez when describing the feeling of seeing the convention floor.

Capouellez credited several people with helping him get to the convention, including Brian Subich, a football coach in the Greater Johnstown School District and staffer for U.S. Rep. Keith Rothfus, R-Sewickley, from the 12th Congressional District.

"I've known Justin for several years, having coached him in football at Johnstown High School and he's always been such a hard-working young man," Subich said in an email interview. "His nickname on the football team was 'Lunchbox' because of the workman-like attitude he brought to the team. I was happy to help give him some guidance and introduce him to some people that assisted him in his journey to the convention."

Capouellez has received the opportunity to interact with several prominent Republicans during convention week, including Rothfus and Pennsylvania Republican Party Chairman Robert Gleason.

He also heard Speaker of the House Paul Ryan address the Pennsylvania delegation during a breakfast reception Monday.

"Everyone loves Paul Ryan," Capouellez said. "They really feel that he represents millennials the way we want to be represented."

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